

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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R 151513Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5263
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1859

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS
SUBJECT: REACTION TO RABIN VISIT

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED: AT A BRIEF CABINET SESSION ON MARCH 14 PRIME MINISTER RABIN REPORTED ON HIS U.S. VISIT. THE GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE BULLETIN SUMMED UP THE DISCUSSION LACONICALLY, MERELY NOTING THAT RABIN REPLIED TO "ELUCIDATORY QUESTIONS ASKED BY A NUMBER OF MINISTERS" AND THAT "MINISTERS EXPRESSED THEIR POSITIVE VALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE VISIT." THERE WAS NO FORMAL DEBATE. ISRAEL RADIO REPORTED THAT ANOTHER CABINET SESSION WOULD TAKE UP THE VISIT AND ALLOW FOR FULLER DISCUSSION.

2. ON HIS RETURN LATE MARCH 13 RABIN HAD CLAIMED SUCCESS FOR HIS VISIT IN HIS REMARKS AT BEN GURION AIRPORT. HE MAINTAINED THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAD SAID NOTHING TO INDICATE A REVERSAL OF HIS PRE-ELECTION STAND THAT ISRAEL SHOULD NOT WITHDRAW FROM JERUSALEM OR THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. RABIN SAID HE HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT
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ISRAEL WOULD NOT RETURN TO THE 1967 BORDERS UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES AND THAT "ISRAEL IS SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO ACCEPT PRESIDENT CARTER'S OPINIONS OR TO DISAGREE WITH THEM." THE PRIME MINISTER ADDED THAT HE EXPECTS A NEW AMERICAN EFFORT TOWARD A SETTLEMENT IN JUNE OR JULY AND DREW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE ROGERS PLAN

AND CARTER'S STATEMENT ON MINOR BORDER ADJUSTMENTS.
THE ROGERS PLAN WAS MEANT TO BE IMPOSED WHILE CARTER HAD
EXPRESSED AN OPINION BUT WANTS THE TWO PARTIES TO DECIDE
THE ISSUES THEMSELVES.

3. ACCORDING TO THE JERUSALEM POST'S REPORT OF THE
CABINET MEETING, DOVES AND HAWKS IN THE CABINET WERE
DIVIDED IN THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S "PEACE
PLAN" WITH DOVES VIEWING IT AS A SOURCE OF HOPE AND
HAWKS SEEING IN THE PLAN A CAUSE FOR CONCERN. THE
POST MAINTAINED THAT ALL AGREE WITH RABIN, HOWEVER,

THAT "TOUGH ARGUING WITH WASHINGTON OVER THE BORDER
ISSUE LIES IN STORE." MINISTER OF JUSTICE HAIM ZADOK
(A DOVE) WAS QUOTED AS POINTING OUT THAT BY ADOPTING ISRAEL'S
DEFINITION OF FULL PEACE, WASHINGTON WAS BY IMPLICATION
AGREEING WITH ISRAEL'S POSITION THAT "END OF BELLIGERENCE"
IS SOMETHING SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN PEACE AND WOULD
THEREFORE REQUIRE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS OF A QUID PRO QUO
FROM ISRAEL.

4. OTHER POINTS THAT EMERGED FROM RABIN'S PRESENTATION
TO THE CABINET, ACCORDING TO REPORTS: CARTER WARNED
AGAINST ANY FURTHER ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES; SECRETARY VANCE MAY RETURN TO THE MIDDLE
EAST THIS SUMMER; AND RABIN IS CONFIDENT CARTER WILL
PRESENT TO THE VISITING ARAB LEADERS THE SAME IDEAS HE
DISCUSSED WITH THE ISRAELIS. "CARTER SPEAKS PLAINLY AND
DOESN'T DOUBLE TALK," RABIN REPORTEDLY SAID.
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5. MEANWHILE, THE PRESS CONTINUES TO COMMENT ON
THE TRIP. WRITING IN THE MARCH 13 DAVAR COLUMNIST
TEDDY PREUSS SAID THAT ALTHOUGH MANY QUESTIONS REMAIN
IN THE WAKE OF CARTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE, ISRAELIS CAN
TAKE SATISFACTION IN KNOWING "WHAT WAS BAD WAS OLD AND
WHAT WAS NEW WAS MOSTLY GOOD."

6. ON THE SAME DAY HAARETZ, DETECTING A GOI BACKING
AWAY SINCE THE VISIT FROM EMPHASIS ON ANOTHER INTERIM
AGREEMENT, WROTE: "IF IT IS TRUE THAT MR. RABIN HAS
SWITCHED FROM GRAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE NOTION OF AN
OVERALL SETTLEMENT TO DEFENDING IT--HE HAS MADE A
180 DEGREE TURN. HIS CONTENTION THAT TODAY, WHEN
ISRAEL 'IS AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS MILITARY POWER', IT
WOULD BE A WASTE OF TIME TO NEGOTIATE ON WITHDRAWAL
FROM ANOTHER 10 KILOMETERS, MAY BE INTENDED MERELY TO
JUSTIFY HIS CHANGE OF APPROACH. BUT PUBLIC OPINION
WILL DEMAND A MORE CONVINCING EXPLANATION."

7. HATZOFEH (NRP) ASSERTS: "...IT STANDS TO REASON THAT NO ARAB REPRESENTATIVE WILL BE PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE ON ALTERATIONS TO THE 1967 BORDERS ONCE HE KNOWS THAT THE UNITED STATES ADVOCATES A RETURN TO THOSE BORDERS. EVEN IF PRESIDENT CARTER DID NOT OUTLINE A PROGRAM, HE HAS CERTAINLY STRENGTHENED THE EXTREMIST AND UNCOMPROMISING ARAB VIEW, AS EXPRESSED BY PRESIDENT SADAT AT THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL."
END UNCLASSIFIED.

8. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL: SEVERAL LIKUD LEADERS WITH WHOM WE SPOKE THOUGHT THE VISIT WAS A FAILURE, ASSUMED A "WE TOLD HIM SO" SMUGNESS (REFERRING TO THEIR REPEATED WARNINGS TO RABIN NOT TO VISIT WASHINGTON BEFORE THE KNESSET ELECTION), AND HINTED AT A MEASURE OF SATISFACTION (AND RELIEF) THAT, IN THEIR
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VIEW, THE VISIT WILL BE OF NO HELP TO THE ALIGNMENT AT THE POLLS.

9. IN THE LABOR PARTY THERE SEEMS TO BE A TENDENCY TO DIVIDE ALONG RABIN-PERES LINES IN ASSESSING THE RESULTS. WHILE PERES IS SAID NOT TO HAVE SPOKEN UP AT THE CABINET SESSION, IN A SPEECH MARCH 15 HE SAID THAT RABIN'S VISIT HAD REVEALED "REAL DIFFERENCES" BETWEEN THE U.S. AND ISRAELI POSITIONS ON THE MIDDLE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1859

EAST. PRESIDENT CARTER SEEMED TO HAVE TAKEN THE ARAB POSITION WHEN TALKING ABOUT BORDERS AND THE ISRAELI POSITION WHEN TALKING ABOUT PEACE. THE TONE OF PERES' REMARKS WAS SOMEWHAT CRITICAL, AND HIS SUPPORTERS APPEAR GENUINELY PLEASED THAT HE HAD PLAYED NO PART IN THE VISIT. (ONE PRESS REPORT ON MARCH 15 SPEAKS OF A "PENDING" VISIT TO WASHINGTON BY PERES. A SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL TOLD THE DATT THAT SUCH A VISIT MIGHT TAKE PLACE IN LATE APRIL.)

10. COMMENT: THERE IS NO SENSE OF ELATION IN ISRAEL AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALKS IN WASHINGTON. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF CONFUSION AS TO WHAT THE VISIT WILL REALLY MEAN TO ISRAEL. ONE OBSERVER SAID THAT THE ISRAELIS CLEARLY LIKED THE PANCAKE (DEFENSIBLE BORDERS) WHEN THEY FIRST SAW IT BUT WHEN IT WAS FLIPPED OVER AND THEY SAW THE OTHER SIDE (NEAR TOTAL WITHDRAWAL) THEY WERE NOT SO CERTAIN. IN ANY CASE IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ISRAELI BODY POLITIC HAS BEEN JOLTED FROM ANY FEELING OF COMPLACENCY IN REGARD TO THE FUTURE.

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11. THE GENESIS OF THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS IS SEEN AS LYING IN THE ROGERS PLAN AND THE BROOKINGS REPORT, THE FIRST OF WHICH IS TOTALLY REJECTED HERE AND THE LATTER REGARDED WITH GRAVE SUSPICION.

12. IT IS TOO EARLY TO ASSESS THE RESULTS OF THE VISIT ON THE ISRAELI INTERNAL SITUATION (WHERE IT MAY WELL HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE ELECTION IN TWO MONTHS' TIME), ON ISRAELI-U.S. RELATIONS IN GENERAL, AND ON THE CHANCES FOR PEACE. ONCE AGAIN, HOWEVER, ISRAEL MAY BE SAVED BY ITS ANTAGONISTS FROM THE HARD DECISIONS IT DOES NOT WANT TO FACE; THAT IS, IF THE NOISES COMING OUT OF THE PNC CONFERENCE IN CAIRO ARE TO BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE.
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